

Living **BLACK JACK** **THE LEGEND**

MAY 2007

SGT Michael Gibson
C Troop, 1-14 CAV
Task Force Warhorse

Warhorse
**Defends
Diwaniyah**

THE HAIFA STREET PROJECT
SPARTANS TEST SGTs

INSIDE





This month's cover shot was taken by SGT Robert Yde while on mission with 1st Battalion, 14th Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Warhorse, 2nd Infantry Division.

The contents page photo was taken by SFC Kap Kim while on a survey mission with the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion's Infrastructure Coordination Element on Haifa St.

Living **BLACK JACK** **THE LEGEND** Official Magazine of 2BCT, 1CD

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Black Jack Soldiers and families:

I would like to lay out for you this month one of the centerpiece operations that we have been conducting in the Karkh Security District – the Haifa Street Project. Many of you have both directly and indirectly been involved in this effort, and I wanted to take this chance to show you the “big picture” and how I believe it will make a difference in making the streets of Baghdad, and especially Karkh, a safer and better place to live for all Iraqis.

First, Haifa Street is located in the center of Baghdad and runs along the west bank of the Tigris River for three kilometers. Approximately 250,000 people call Haifa Street and its neighboring communities home. The area has Sunni, Shia and mixed neighborhoods. It has both houses that are centuries old and newer high-rise apartments built in the 1970s and 80s.

Once a vibrant and prosperous community, Karkh used to be considered one of the better places to live in Baghdad. In fact, during Saddam's time, many of his cronies and henchmen had homes in the area.

By December of last year, Haifa Street had fallen on hard times. Al-Qaida in Iraq, Ta'whid Wa Jihad, and criminal gangs had taken over the area, terrorizing the residents and attacking security forces whenever they had the chance. Sectarian murders happened every day, with 53 in the first few weeks of January alone. The residents of these neighborhoods were the prey and victims of ruthless killers and had given up hope for a better life.

The Black Jack Brigade rolled into Karkh in January. From day one, it was a fight. We quickly won the kinetic fight. By the end of February, we had killed, captured or forced our enemies to crawl under a rock and hide somewhere. I have never doubted your abilities as warriors, and the fact that you brought peace to one of the worst areas of Baghdad is an amazing testament to your skill and courage. But the kinetic fight was only the first step. With the enemy at least temporarily absent, we had to immediately capitalize on our success in order to win the passive support of the residents of Karkh. To do this, we instituted a three-part plan, the Haifa Street Project, to make life better for the people and to ensure that the area remained secure and stable.

Part 1 of the Haifa Street Project is to conduct projects that demonstrate a visible sign of change. War-torn streets with bullet-riddled buildings should not be a part of a living city. Therefore, Part 1 includes fixing these things and making Haifa Street a place people can be proud to live in. This has already begun, and we have seen the removal of hundreds of destroyed cars, the repair of several buildings, and the removal of propaganda posters and graffiti.



ILT William Pendleton, with 2BSTB's ICE, talks with two young Haifa Street residents.

Part 2 of the Haifa Street Project is to improve essential services. Because of the enemy presence in the area, the residents did not have many of the most basic services, such as water, sewer, electricity and trash. Schools and medical facilities were also closed. We have been working on dozens of projects, worth millions of dollars, to improve the essential services along Haifa Street. In a short time, we have restored many basic services, reopened several medical facilities, and most notably, reopened all of the schools in Karkh. We have shown the people what their government can do for them by making life better for thousands of people.

Part 3 of the Haifa Street Project is to ensure we continue to conduct joint Iraqi/Coalition Forces Security Operations. Patrols, checkpoints, clearing operations and the establishment of Joint Security Stations continue to keep our enemy off balance and on the run. Our continued vigilance to protect the Iraqi people is the most important thing we do. It allows the Iraqi people the opportunity to rebuild their neighborhoods and their lives.

The Haifa Street Project will make life better for the people of Karkh and, in turn, improve security and keep us safer. You are the key to the success of this operation – your patrols, raids, cordon and searches, and supporting operations are what have made a difference. We still have a long way to go, but we are making a difference. Remain dedicated, vigilant and watch out for your buddy. I am very proud of everyone in the BCT; thanks for what you do. Remember, it takes teamwork – together, we can and will win.

BE: POSITIVE, POLITE, PROFESSIONAL, PREPARED TO HELP AND PREPARED TO KILL!

Black Jack 6

Brayden J. Roberts



Residents of Haifa Street now move safely about the area, once regarded as one of Baghdad's worst neighborhoods.



Black Hawk 4/9

Bringing peace of mind to those who need it most...

**Story & Photos by
SPC Alexis Harrison
Black Jack Public Affairs**

BAGHDAD — Troops from 4-9 Cav.'s, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. patrol the Haifa Street area daily, shadowed by scores of children who greet them at every stop they make to ask for chocolate or a soccer ball.

Most of the Soldiers don't mind handing out a couple sweets for the children to enjoy while they trek through the war-torn neighborhood the children call home.

The "Black Hawk" Troop, commanded by CPT Chris Dawson who hails from

Lima, Ohio, provides an essential service to residents who've been through so many violent times: peace of mind.

1LT Brian Long, a fire support officer and "Blue" Platoon's leader from Jacksonville, Fla., said there's nothing more important than getting to know the people in the area and addressing their concerns.

He said that even months after the heaviest of fighting happened, people are still coming to his troops with information and questions on what's happened in recent months.

The troop took over the area after a heavy bout of insur-

CPT Chris Dawson gets along with the kids in Karkh

gent activity forced many to flee their homes or hide for their own safety. Several days of fighting occurred before the Cavalry troops finally reduced the violence, allowing many people to come back and start to live their lives.

Attacks on coalition forces have since dropped by more than 50 percent. Dozens of bodies were found along sectarian fault lines in the area, but since the new security plan has been established, the Black Hawk troops have not found a single body lying in the street or anywhere in their sector.

Bringing peace to neighborhoods like this one is one of the major improvements the Soldiers from the “Black Jack” Brigade have been able to accomplish since they arrived last year.

However, as one Soldier recounts, it wasn’t as peaceful the last time he was here.

SSG Jebediah Arthur was with 3-82 FA, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div., a few years ago when the First Team was in Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom

II. He said heavy fighting was a regular occurrence for him and his troops.

The Moran, Texas native said that Iraqis weren’t always as friendly as they are now. They used to shy away from any contact with Soldiers and wouldn’t provide more than a cold stare or an unfriendly gesture.

Black Hawk 4/9

Now, everywhere the Soldiers go, they are greeted like visitors to an almost second home. The people, in the community Arthur and his comrades visit, speak freely to them and often provide an inside look into what’s really happening in their community.

“It’s finally gotten to where they can come and talk to us and work with everyone,” Arthur said. “Acting professionally helps, but they actually see the results of the information they give us. I think that’s been the key to our success over here this time.”

The troops have been busy with other duties than just patrolling the busy streets. Recently, a medical operation headed by the troop and other Soldiers from the brigade took place to bring some much-needed care to the residents.

The leaders of the troop realize how important it is to continue their work and not to give up on the people of the area.

Long said that the coalition forces have gained a lot of momentum against violence in the area.

“Being out there every day is a good way to dispel the rumors that we’re not doing anything but helping with the growth of these neighborhoods,” Long said. “We are seeing improvements, and we are appreciated by the people we interact with.”



SSG Jebediah Arthur pulls security during a patrol stop in Karkh

SPARTAN NCOs

FACE TRIAL BY FIRE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
SFC KAP KIM

FOB PROSPERITY, Iraq – In the recent epic movie about the ancient Spartan's, where a young boy was sent in the wild with no food, no clothes and with only his will to survive, he grew up to be a great warrior who would lead a nation to glory.

If that served as inspiration for the modern-day Spartans of the 2nd BSTB, they laughed at those Spartans' right-of-passage when they decided to step up their own noncommissioned officer indoctrination with tougher, more grueling tasks such as calling for a medical evacuation, putting together an M-4 rifle, and a Soldier cohesion exercise during a ceremony here April 10.

According to SFC Matt Villanueva, HHC, 2nd BSTB, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div., the NCO induction ceremony is their battalion's way of formally introducing them into the NCO Corps.

This is the second time the Spartan Battalion has had the ceremony, and plans on doing this once every quarter to formally welcome every new NCO.

"When I did it, back when I was a



CPL Allan Timmons lights a torch as a part of the hall of the seven Army values during the NCO induction ceremony on April 10.

corporal, it was traumatic," recalled the Pueblo, Colo., native. "The biggest difference now is that it's an anti-hazing format."

The NCOs, more than a dozen of them throughout the battalion and HHC, 2nd BCT, received an in-ranks inspection from 1SG Darryl Teramano, the top noncommissioned officer for Co. B, 2nd BSTB. As he found deficiencies, he made each NCO drop and do 25 push-ups.

"I did this because you are NCOs; you're supposed to make sure your Soldiers have everything," Teramano said. "This is not the place to be out of uniform." After the inspection, they broke off into smaller groups and went from station to station performing a multitude of tasks ranging from calling in a MEDEVAC to reassembling an M-4 rifle while blindfolded, and a cohesion-building course.

During each of the stations, other NCOs, who led the stations, inserted a little calisthenics while the in-

SGT Gaston Gray (right) tries to put an M-4 rifle back together blind-folded as Staff Sgt. Yamil Villafane tries to motivate him during the NCO induction ceremony April 10.





SGT Ryan Lahr drinks from the ceremonial grog during the NCO induction ceremony April 10.

ductees were performing their individual tasks.

SSG Yamil Villafane, HHC, 2nd BSTB, put the inductees on their backs and made them do the “dying cockroach.”

“This was used to motivate them through their physical needs ... to get them into the right state of mind,” Villanueva said. “We want them to remember this for a while.” During each of the stations, the inductees were made to sound-off, or loudly, recite the NCO Creed.

According to SGT Jeffrey Bauer, HHC, 2nd BSTB of Fort Towson, Okla., the experience was a “great” one.

“This really opened my eyes on the things I need to do to take care of my Soldiers,” he said. “I think it was a great experience.”

After all the tasks were done, the inductees called over to the hall of the seven leadership values.

The hall was constructed of seven torches. Each inductee had to drink from the ceremonial grog before he or she was to be considered in joining the rest of the battalion’s NCOs on the other side.

During the ceremony, SFC Greg-

ory White, HHC, 2nd BSTB, served as the master of ceremony and said this:

“The gate of fire symbolizes the tradition of the Spartan army when young warriors would pass through the gate as a right of passage from childhood to warrior. Today this gate of fire symbolizes the right of passage for the newly promoted NCOs of the Spartan Battalion from the ranks of the junior enlisted to the Corps of the Noncommissioned Officer. The seven torches represent the seven Army values -- values that all professional NCOs must possess.”

Each of the Spartan Battalion’s first sergeants introduced their inductees to the rest of the NCOs in attendance and asked for permission to take them through the hall of fire.

According to SGT Herbert Wilson, B, 2nd BSTB of Spring Hill, Fla., being formally inducted into the NCO Corps was different and special because he can say that he was promoted while in Iraq.

“I thought [this] would be a waste of time,” he said, “but once we got into it, it was pretty cool.”



Soldiers with Crazyhorse Troop pull security in downtown Diwaniyah with help from soldiers with the Iraq Army's 8th Division.

TF 1-14 CAV.

Warhorse Soldiers spent most of the much of April restoring order to the city of Diwaniyah.



Stories and Photos by SGT Robert Yde

Apocalypse leads TF 1-14 into Diwaniyah

FOB ECHO, Iraq – With coalition forces focusing much of their efforts on Baghdad, many anti-Iraqi forces have fled the capital city and moved their operations to smaller towns around Iraq.

Diwaniyah, located in southern Iraq, is one of these towns that had seen a spike in violence and AIF activity, and coalition forces recently turned their attention toward restoring peace in the area.

“As a result of the surge, we believe that some of the key leaders who were causing the problems have moved out of Baghdad and into these outlying towns; so we’re moving out to wrap these guys up,” explained CPT Gerald

Resmondo, commander of Troop A, TF 1-14 Cav.

“Security in Baghdad has improved. So they were able to free up some combat power to do this, and we’re part of that combat power.”

TF 1-14 Cav., a Stryker unit which is attached to the 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div., spent much of the month of April operating out of FOB Echo, which is located outside Diwaniyah and led the main thrust of what was known as Operation Wyatt Earp and focused on taking the town back from AIF.

After leaving FOB Union III, April 3, TF 1-14 Cav. convoyed south to FOB Kalsu where they stayed for three days making final preparations for their mission.

While at FOB Kalsu, Soldiers attended ranges and continued to build upon the train-

ing that started before they left FOB Union III.

“The Soldiers went through basically every battle drill and back to the fundamentals,” Resmondo said of the preparations his troop’s Soldiers went through during the weeks preceding the operation.

After a reconnaissance mission the day prior, Resmondo and “Apocalypse” Troop led the task force out of FOB Kalsu and into Diwani-

yah early on the morning of April 6 for what would be 72 hours of consecutive combat operations for the task force Soldiers.

“We’re the lead element for the task force,” Resmondo said. “It’s our job to make sure that the rest of the task force gets into the fight. If

we’re successful then the whole task force will be successful, so I feel that we’ve got a pretty important piece of this mission.”

Although they did encounter resistance, which was heavy at times, “Apocalypse” Troop had little difficulty entering the city and establishing security as the rest of the task force followed them in.

On the way into the city, the route clearance team discovered several roadside bombs and the Soldiers were met with small-arms fire and rocket propelled grenades as they fought to establish their positions.

Once coalition forces had established themselves in the city, the AIF’s will to fight seemed to taper off as the attacks decreased



Soldiers with Troop A, 1-14 Cav. pull security with soldiers from the 8th Iraqi army during an operation in Diwaniyah April 7.



SPC Raymond Watson, assigned to Troop A, TF 1-14 Cav. looks through a bag of roadside bomb making material found during a clearing operation in the town of Diwaniyah April 7.

and the Soldiers were able to accomplish everything that they set out to do over the first day.

"We did really well, and were successful in the fact that all the objectives that we decided to hit we did," Resmondo said. "My troop was able to secure the route and that let everyone flow in, so we accomplished the mission there. The other troop and company seized their objective. They fought their way through their objective and received a lot of contact coming in, but we were able to seize the ground and maintain our strongholds in the center of the city."

During the first 24 hours, 'Apocalypse' Troop was responsible for securing the area with their Strykers. They returned to FOB Echo late on the night of April 6 and rested for a few hours before returning to the city early the next morning to begin clearing operations in conjunction with elements from the 8th Iraqi Army Division. Their efforts paid off quickly as they came across a large cache of roadside bomb making material in what appeared to be an abandoned building.

"Everything was just in plastic bags in here, and they tried to hide it up a little bit ... but they didn't go through too much trouble to hide it and the Iraqi army found it," explained SPC Raymond Watson, as he laid out the items that were discovered so they could be photographed and documented.

Resmondo described the find as an "IED factory." An explosive ordinance team was called in

and the material was destroyed on site, as the Soldiers continued their clearing operations of the area.

After wrapping up their clearing operations for the day, Apocalypse Troop took up a secure position in the city where they settled for the night, ensuring that they retained the ground they had gained during the day.

According to SSG Jason Jones, much of what the task force was doing had become routine operations for the Soldiers during their ten months in Iraq, but he said that the operation as a whole is the largest that they have taken part in.

"This is the biggest one we've done," Jones, a native of Clarksville, Tenn. said, "Everything we're doing is on the fly. A lot of it is up to what the enemy does."

Resmondo agreed and said that one of the biggest factors he and his Soldiers face is the fatigue that sets in from almost 72 hours of consecutive operations.

In the days following the initial push, he said more control should transition to the Iraqi army, which would allow his Soldiers more down time.

After the first two days of the operation though, Resmondo said everything is going well. Several suspected AIF personnel have been detained and caches and individual weapons have been taken off the street.

"So far we've been really successful in fighting the militia and seizing ground from them," Resmondo said. "We've been able to maintain our strongholds in the center of the city and have done a lot of synchronization with the 8th Iraqi Army. All and all the mission has been very successful."

1SG Shane Austen, with Troop A, TF 1-14 Cav., examines a pistol that was found during clearing operations in the town of Diwaniyah April 7.



CRAZYHORSE SEARCHES FOR CACHES, HIGH VALUE TARGETS



Soldiers with Troop C, 1-14 Cav. search the backyard of a suspected militia member's home during a raid in Diwaniyah April 12.

FOB ECHO, Iraq – After spending the previous day focusing their efforts in the central market area of Diwaniyah, Soldiers with the “Bandit” platoon, part of Troop C, TF 1-14 Cav., attached to the 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. moved to the outskirts of town April 12 to continue their operations in the southern Iraqi city.

The Soldiers rolled into the southeastern edge of town in their Strykers with two objectives in mind. Like the day prior, they were again in search of a suspected militia member who was being considered a high value target. After completing their raid and search of the area, the Soldiers were to search a nearby palm grove that was suspected to be a possible mortar launching point and hiding place for weapon caches.

Upon reaching their initial objective, the Soldiers quickly entered and cleared the house, only to find that their target was not

there. However there were several women at the house and after talking to them, acting platoon leader, SFC Rodney Bryant was able to confirm that his Soldiers were on the right trail.

“I talked to his sister and she told us that the target does live there and he is an IP (Iraqi Police Officer),” the Fayetteville, NC native said. “She said he wasn’t home at the time - he was at work.”

After questioning the man’s sister, Bryant and his Soldiers searched the other houses in the immediate area and asked the man’s neighbors if they could provide any information on the suspected militia member.

“Most of the people in the surrounding area knew the guy, but only a few of them knew he was bad,” SGT Michael Schmieder, a native of Fort Worth, Texas said. “Then again, they themselves could be bad and just trying to protect him.”

After clearing a fence, Soldiers with Troop C, 1-14 Cav get back on line to continue their sweep of a palm grove on the outskirts of Diwaniyah April 12.



However, after questioning several people, the Soldiers did find one man who was able to confirm that their target was involved in militia activity and was willing to provide information that could help locate him.

“I talked to a police captain who lived in the area and he did know that the guy we were looking for works at the IP station, and the captain identified him and said he is a member of a militia in the area,” Bryant said. “He knows he’s bad and is willing to give us more information on him if need be. We



SPC Steven Reyes pulls security on the streets of Diwanayah during a search for a high value target April 11

gave him a tip-line card and we expect him to call back to help us with possible future targeting.”

After clearing the area and obtaining all the information they could on their initial target, the “Bandit” Soldiers transitioned to a nearby palm grove and took part in a sweep of the area, which was roughly one square kilometer.

According to Schmieder the Soldiers targeted this area because they suspected that militia members might be using the palm grove as a mortar launch point and a place to hide weapon caches.

“They try to put stuff in places where they think we won’t go like this,” Schmieder said of the palm grove. “They see us focus on all the buildings and they think we’ll never go over here.”

Making their way through the palm grove proved difficult at times as the vegetation was thick at spots and they had to trudge through ankle deep mud in others. Several chain-link fences, which the Soldiers had to either find a way around or climb under, also impeded their path.

While slowly making their way through the palm groves the Soldiers looked for any signs indicative of militia activity.

“Sometimes it’s obvious, like freshly dug dirt,” Schmieder explained. “Sometimes maybe there’s like a campsite or evidence that somebody’s been hanging out around there or maybe somebody that’s wanted by us might actually be hanging out in the area trying to avoid us.”

While his Soldiers looked under fallen palm leaves and areas that looked like they had been dug

in for possible hiding spots for weapon caches, Bryant said that any freshly dug or burnt areas on the ground would be the biggest indicator that mortars were being fired from the area.

“We’re looking for any type of dug in position, especially any dug dirt and burnt grass, weeds or soil around the area,” he explained. “Something like that would tip us off of recent mortar launches.”

The Soldiers came across several suspicious areas in the palm groves, such as an abandoned building with what appeared to be an adjacent junk yard

and an abandoned box truck, but found nothing definitive of militia activity during their search.

Although his Soldiers did not find anything, Bryant said that they were able to gain some valuable information about the suspected militia member and stressed that just their presence in the area would have disrupted any militia activity during the day.

“We didn’t find anything but I do feel we were successful in our mission today,” he said. “We got a lot of [intelligence] on the target and if there were any possible hiding spots for caches or potential mortar launch points in the palm grove, I think we disrupted those.”

SPC Jason McCartney searches through fallen palm leaves in the outskirts of Diwanayah April 12.



Mortarmen conduct around the clock fire missions



SPC Jason Compton drops a mortar into the launching tube as SPC Domingo Sanchez (left) and SPC Anthony Rogers brace themselves for the blast at FOB Echo April 14.

FOB ECHO, Iraq – For many months, coalition Soldiers based at FOB Echo had been the victims of nightly mortar attacks originating from the nearby town of Diwaniyah.

As the security situation in Diwaniyah continued to deteriorate, the Baghdad-based, Stryker unit, TF 1-14 Cav., attached to the 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. was sent to FOB Echo to help out. After arriving to the FOB, putting a stop to the constant mortar and rocket attacks was a top priority.

“Basically when we first arrived here, the FOB was receiving several mortar and rocket attacks,” explained Troop A commander, CPT Gerald Resmondo. “We set up a two-front operation. One is the mortars that we have established here on FOB Echo. They conduct a counter mortar where they pick outlying locations that are possible locations where mortars or rockets could be fired from.”

Twenty-four hours a day, Soldiers from “Apocalypse” and “Crazyhorse” troops, conduct preplanned fire missions several times throughout the day, as well as any other missions that may come during the day.

At the same time, other Soldiers are out in sector looking for militia mortar fire teams and

this is the second part of the two-front operation, which Resmondo referred to.

“The second front is what we do at night, where I push out the troop, and we deny the terrain,” explained the West Palm Beach, Fla. native. “We basically set on a piece of terrain out there that [intelligence] assessments lead us to believe is an area that AIF (anti-Iraqi forces) would use to launch mortars or rockets, and we will establish static OPs (observation points) and search any vehicles in those areas, and we will investigate any suspicious activities such as mortar teams or rocket teams that are moving in and out of the area.”

Back at the FOB, mortar teams continue to fire around the clock to deter attacks on the base and support the Soldiers out in sector.

“We shoot a pretty significant amount, probably close to 100 rounds a day,” Rochester, Wash. native, SFC Shane Gervais said.

For most of the Soldiers on the mortar teams, this mission is the first chance they have had to fire mortars since arriving in Iraq nearly 10 months ago.

"We don't get to do this mission in Baghdad, and it's a nice change of pace to do what we're actually trained to do," Gervais said. "When we're in Baghdad, we just do presence patrols, raids, clearance ops, all that other stuff just like 11Bs (infantrymen) would."

The Soldiers have established two firing points and at all times one is up and operational in case a mission comes down through the fire direction center, which is set up in one of the Strykers, and is where calls for fire are received and processed.

Between missions, equipment maintenance and cleaning are performed to ensure everything is working properly and to cut down on the chance of any misfires.

Each fire team is made up of three Soldiers: the gunner, the assistant gunner and the ammo barer.

While each job is essential, the gunner plays the central role.

"I deal with the elevation, make sure all the levels are right and make sure everything is functional," explained SPC Domingo Sanchez, a gunner with Troop C. "The gunner is the main person who makes sure everything is working right and everything is leveled and makes sure the other guys are doing their jobs. So if they're doing their jobs and I'm doing mine we get the mission done."

As Sanchez's ammo barer, SPC Anthony Rogers says his main job is to prep the rounds and get them ready to fire.

"I set the fuses and the time for when they need to burst and the charges for the flight," Rogers said.

Once all the prep work has been done, the process of actually firing the rounds is performed in a matter of seconds.

The mortar teams fire either illumination rounds or high explosive rounds depending on what each specific mission calls for.

The request for illumination rounds is usually called in from sector at night and according to Resmondo serves two purposes for his troops.

"Once we get eyes on an observer location,



SPC Jason Compton (right) prepares mortar rounds for a fire mission, while SPC Domingo Sanchez makes final preparations to the launching point April 14.

we'll call for illum., initially, just to light up an area and show the enemy that we can do that," he explained "The second reason is so that we can observe anything that could possibly be out in the open areas."

This two-front combination of continual mortar fire from the FOB and the Soldiers operating out in the city has seemingly paid off as rocket and mortar attacks on FOB Echo have decreased significantly.

"I think over the last few days we've had one rocket attack and it wasn't very accurate. So it seems to be working," Gervais said.

SGT Jason Chavis, with Troop A, said he believes that the mortar teams have had more of a psychological impact than a physical impact on militia in the area, but noted that the outcome is the same.

"They said that everybody's in hiding now," the Pembroke, N.C. native said of the feedback he is hearing from the Soldiers out patrolling Diwaniyah everyday. "They said that they're not coming out and all the shooting and everything else has calmed down."

As life has improved in the city, it has also improved for the coalition soldiers based at FOB Echo.

"The situation has definitely improved here on the FOB," Resmondo said. "We've seen all our multi-national coalition counterparts playing soccer on the field and doing those types of things. It's still not completely safe, but it has definitely gotten a lot better."

Black Jack launches Haifa Street Project

Story and Photos by SFC Kip Kim

BAGHDAD, Iraq – During a press conference of Iraqi media members, COL Bryan Roberts addressed issues concerning the revitalization of the Haifa Street district in Karkh with a project simply called, “The Haifa Street Project.”

Once described by many as “hell on earth,” Roberts, 2nd Brigade Combat Team’s commander, wanted to help change that image and restore the once affluent and culturally-rich Baghdad district through a series of public works.

“It’s an initiative in cooperation with local leaders to improve security, essential services and economic opportunities in Karkh,” he said. “This exciting project will provide a

way ahead to the secure, stable and prosperous neighborhoods that Iraqis want and deserve.”

The initiative sent the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion’s Infrastructure Coordination Element into action. Although they have already been working with the Karkh District Advisory Council and the Baladiyah since the brigade’s arrival to Baghdad on essential service-type issues such as sewer, trash, and electricity, the ICE is now focusing on patching up the scars inflicted by fierce fighting throughout the years there.

“The goal of this project is to make Haifa Street a safer, cleaner and better place to live, work

Members of 2BSTB’s ICE walk down Haifa Street and assess the damage caused by the intense fighting earlier this year.



and enjoy the center of Baghdad,” Roberts said. “A joint venture between the NACs (Neighborhood Advisory Council), Karkh DAC, Baladiyah, Amanant and security forces, the Haifa Street Project will be a visible sign of progress that all Iraqis can be proud of and other districts will emulate.”

According to Roberts, the Haifa Street Project is going to be in three parts:

Part one will be projects that demonstrate visible signs of change and a return to normalcy. “Buildings damaged by fighting, streets littered with destroyed cars, anti-Iraqi graffiti, closed parks and playgrounds aren’t part of a living city,” he said.

Part two will concentrate on improving the essential services. “We have started assessments and working with local leaders to repair these systems,” Roberts commented. “All residents of Karkh deserve a healthy, sanitary and safe environment, and we are dedicated to helping this happen when and where we can.”

Lastly, part three is the security operations. “Karkh is patrolled day and night and Coalition and Iraqi forces have forged a strong partnership dedicated to fighting those who would kill innocent Iraqi men, women and children,” Roberts concluded.

Iraqi Police commander, COL Baha, whose department watches over Karkh, noted that since their constant presence in the area started, violent crime has dropped exponentially: from over 50 murder cases in January, to only a single case in March.

As a direct result of the increased security, Baha said markets are rapidly re-opening, children are going back to school and many of the families who fled out of fear

have started coming back to their homes.

SSG Sean Clark, an ICE member and a Schenectady, N.Y. native, and his team have spent a lot of time walking the streets of Karkh in the past few months. He said seeing some of the architecture was like that of Bourbon St. in New Orleans.

“I’m like, ‘it’s not bad,’” he commented on some of the historical buildings.

According to 1LT William Pendleton, of Anaheim, Calif., this project will be the first major expenditure on war damage.

“Most of it focuses on neglect – 40 years of neglect – direct results of combat,” Pendleton said.

“The scope [of this project] is huge. Working on the apartments will be the scope of the project.”

Pendleton, who said he and his team can view Haifa Street from their balcony on Forward Operating Base Prosperity, Baghdad, said he remembers when the team



MAJ Chip Daniels (left), the ICE chief and SGM Jeffrey Seidel, talk about what buildings that need to be worked on during an assessment of Haifa Street.

watched as Coalition gun ships lit up the Baghdad skies a few months ago to push out the insurgency.

“It’s just amazing there now,” he said of the atmosphere of safety on the streets there. “We were out there for three hours and not a single gunshot or explosion.”

Most of the safety, in large part, is due to the partnership between the Coalition Forces and Iraqi Police constant presence within Karkh. There are currently 29 different projects, valued at over \$6.3 million.

“If you see this place now, think about what it will look like in six months,” said MAJ Chip Daniels, the ICE chief from Palmyra, Pa. “You all are a part of history,” he told his team after an assessment mission. “You should be proud to tell your families you are a part of this.”

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Black Jack Sports

File and Folder Tasks

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Other Places

- Desktop
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Details

Black Jack Sports

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15th's Bunny Bash 1.jpg
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by SPC Jessica Pumares of the
15th Brigade Support Battalion

B-Ball Tourney 1.jpg
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Fight Night 1.jpg
Fight Night 2.jpg
Fight Night 3.jpg
by SFC Kap Kim

Layout by SPC Kate Huff



15th's Bunny Bash 1.jpg



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B-Ball Tourney 1.jpg



B-Ball Tourney 2.jpg



Fight Night 1.jpg



Fight Night 2.jpg



Fight Night 3.jpg



2/5/6 MCT Celebrates

Graduation Day

Story & Photos by SPC Alexis Harrison
Black Jack Public Affairs



PT was a part of every morning for the NCOs in training

FOB HONOR, Iraq – For a week, Iraqi soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, were put to the test in order to become noncommissioned officers.

The 2-5-6 Military Transition Team from 2-12 Infantry attached to the 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. led the NCOs while training them into the leaders and warriors that would one day lead their soldiers and country to victory.

The training culminated in a formal graduation ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the International Zone, but leaders from the transition team said it took a lot of dedication from the soldiers to get to where they are and where they hope to lead the Iraqi Army.

According to the team's top NCO, 1SG Harold Drager, the idea to train the NCOs into better leaders came from the Iraqi Army Battalion's commander and top NCO.

He said that it was crafted to suit the demands and situations the Iraqi NCOs face while trying to reclaim their country.

While the specific classes changed every day, physical training and the instruction on what it takes to make a

leader effective were a part of every lesson.

"One of the most important things we taught them was Army Values and leadership

traits," Drager said. "It's important because every other task we train is a normal, individual task, but without a leader leading with the Army values in mind – doing things the right way, they wouldn't be able to conduct successful raids and operations."

Most days the Iraqi NCOs would learn more specialized skills like medical training, room-clearing procedures, marksmanship skills and even a confidence course that would test their resolve as not only individuals but as teams.

All the events and training culminated in a trip to the city streets the NCOs would soon be in charge of leading soldiers through. They went to a traffic control point to observe and make suggestions on how to improve security for the busy marketplace. They also did a friendly, cordon-and-knock mission to engage with the locals and prove just how professional they had become.

"We've all learned a lot from this training," said an Iraqi soldier who didn't want to be named. "I hope to help my soldiers with what I've learned."

During the week, the team also watched as the confidence level rose and the NCOs began to use more and more of the skills they learned.

"They are much more prepared to lead now than they were a week ago," Drager said. "They're becoming more capable help to us, the Army and the military as a whole. It's all about them taking back their own country in the end."



Night Ops at Honor



FTX on the city streets



Marksmanship training with SFC Anson Sitton

Red Dragon's build boxing ring, prepare for Fight Night

Story and Photos by SFC Kap Kim

FOB UNION III, Iraq – In the movie, *Field of Dreams*, it was the words, “If you build it, they will come,” that motivated a farmer to build a baseball field in an Iowa corn field.

As SPC Timothy Dunbar, of Lowell, Mass., looked out onto a bombed-out floor of the former Ba’ath Party Headquarters, just outside his bedroom window, those similar words rang through his head.

Just days before christening a boxing ring that’ll be used for the first-ever, “Black Jack Fight Night,” Dunbar and a few other Soldiers put some finishing touches on a boxing ring they built for the tournament.

They dubbed the location, “Hell Raiser’s Hideout,” and during the upcoming boxing smoker, Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment and 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, both units with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, will square off in the ring.

“Several months ago, the battalion commander and I talked about hosting a boxing smoker,” said Miami native CSM Calvin Morman, 3-82nd FA’s top noncommissioned officer. “After our conversation, my response was, ‘Roger Sir, I got it.’ Because of the (operational tempo) of the battalion’s mission and the troop surge, time passed. Out of the blue, the brigade asked us to host a boxing smoker with one of our sister battalions, 4-9 Cav.”

According to Dunbar, Morman asked him to do some research on boxing ring dimensions. He went online to find out what the dimension should be and put it on paper. Later, he offered up his services in building the ring.

“Originally, it was just going to be some wood and rope,” he said. “From there, we got a great welder and started putting it together in little pieces. From that, we just kept adding and adding details ... even the lights above.”

Dunbar and his roommate, PFC Justin Netherland, of Hamburg, Miss., both have back-



A new boxing ring sits in “Hell Raisers Hideout,” built by 3-82FA Soldiers for the the brigade’s “Fight Night Tournament.”

grounds in boxing. They used to train and fight in the “Golden Gloves” amateur level during their youth. Two other PFCs, Timothy Iuchs, of Sedalia, Mo. and Jared Decker of Oskaloosa, Kan., never boxed in their life, but said they wanted to help out.

“We just wanted to make it as real as possible against the environment around us,” said Dunbar, who pointed at the war-damaged building that surrounds the ring. “I mean, it’s just like home, but with the feel of Baghdad all around us.”

Morman, along with others from 3-82nd, who have seen the ring transform from just raw materials said it is as close to the real thing as humanly possible.

“I think it would be very similar to a real fight-night except for the location,” Morman said. “You won’t see a fight night like ours. The location for this event is a run down foyer in the middle of the former Ba’ath party headquarters. Its rugged appearance adds something more than any fight televised. Not even ‘Rocky’ had this type of setting.”

According to Dunbar, during this project, everyone came by the “Hell Raiser’s Hideout” to lend a hand.

Welders, such as SGT John Klempnow of Bay City, Mich., helped fabricate the corner

posts. SSG James Martin, of Bowling Green, Mich., helped by constructing the flooring.

Martin, who has helped build houses in the past, said helping build the ring was interesting because he had never done it before.

Dunbar added that much of the work started in the evening when they were done with their day's mission requirements. In all, Dunbar said the ring took more than 300 man-hours to build.

"We'd come out here and work on it four or five hours a night," he said. "Sometimes, we'd be out here until two in the morning working on this. Every step of the way, we asked, 'How do we make it look like a professional ring?'"

Dunbar said a local painter added the writing on the ring, turnbuckles and the skirt.

The team is anticipating people's reaction as they enter the 'Hell Raiser's Hide-out.' Building the ring and organizing the event has been really great for Decker.

"It's just fun to have something to work on and pass the time," Decker said.

Although building the ring was fun, it did come with its set of challenges, Dunbar said.

"The turn posts -- it didn't help that the ground was unlevelled," he recalled.

Though they had a limited budget, Dunbar said they did it at a mere fraction of what it would cost to just purchase the materials and build a ring, even without labor costs.

Through all the minor setbacks, the team built the ring and threw in a little more for the spectators and fighters because they wanted to put on a good show, said Dunbar.

"I want people to feel like this is an old Tyson/Holyfield fight when you see all the lights lit up," Dunbar said. "I used to box. Not all the guys had the 'big game,' but every boxer here will feel like a celebrity. Even if you are not a fan of boxing, you'll like this."

For SPC Chris Thomas, who is a Military Transition Team member from Camden, N.J., the ring is "amazing." Thomas, who has an amateur record of 3-0, has been using the ring the last few weeks to train up for his fight.

"The canvas--this material is good, and these guys put a lot of time into it," he said. "It's perfect; it's like any other ring. It's as real as it gets."

SPC Timothy Dunbar headed up the team that spent the last couple of months coordinating a boxing tournament and building the ring.



Change of command is role reversal for commanding couple

Story and Photos by SFC Kap Kim

FOB PROPERITY, Iraq - The saying is that behind every great man is a great woman.

That saying was proven true during the change of command ceremony for Co. C, 15th BSB, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. here April 1.

CPT Ken S. Murray, of Baton Rouge, La., handed over the reigns of Co. C to his wife, CPT Teresa D. Murray of West Palm Beach, Fla., in front of the Troop Medical Clinic the company recently built.

With this change of command, Ken and Teresa have reversed their roles. Ken is moving up to the brigade as its Brigade Medical planner, Teresa's previous position.

"I can think of no better person to leave this family with than my own family," Ken said. "She's a beautiful person, a tremendous officer, and in my eyes ... perfect."

"It's happenstance that my wife has followed me here because they are putting the best qualified, Medical Service Corps officer to take command of Charlie Company."

For Teresa, she is really excited about taking command.

Ken started his command Nov. 20, 2005. LTC Jeffrey Vieira, the 15th BSB's commander, noted that during Ken's time as a commander, he took a unit, well below full strength with a lot of old and obsolete equipment, and completely turned it around.

"Ken accomplished this feat through one of the most demanding training programs I've ever seen," Vieira told the attendants. "This company stayed in the field more than any other company in the battalion. Following the completion of home-station training, we deployed to NTC (National Training Center) where Trauma was consistently labeled the best - whether it was medic skills, MAS-CAL (mass casualty) planning and execution, triage and on and on. Charlie Company continued to train right till the day we stepped on the plane to Kuwait."

Vieira told Ken that he and his first sergeant, 1SG Anthony Pena, that they were the best company trainers he's ever seen.

"Thanks for the hard work and dedication to me and the Gamblers over the last 17 months, and really, to the Black Jack Brigade," he added.

Vieira said Teresa comes into command with a great reputation from her work in the Brigade Surgeon's Cell.

"I'm completely confident in your abilities to build upon the successes of Trauma, and I look forward to seeing it," he told her.

CPT Teresa Murray, (left to right), LTC Jeffrey Vieira, and CPT Ken Murray, stand in front of the company formation prior to Co. C, 15th BSB's change of command ceremony.





CPT Teresa Murray, cuts a cake as her husband, CPT Ken Murray watches after their change of command ceremony.

For Teresa, taking command is a “great opportunity.”

“It’s a lot of responsibility, but it’s a way for me to take care of Soldiers, make a difference in their lives, and it’s a pretty exciting thing,” she said. “He’s done a great job with this unit so far.”

Ken said he believes she’ll do well because she comes into the command already knowing almost all the Soldiers and due to her “different” leadership style.

“She and I both have two completely different styles of leadership, and she’s more capable than I am anyway,” he said. “I think I’ll probably be asking how she did things and why she made that decision and adding it on to my own kitbag.”

Teresa said although she usually takes a “softer” approach in leading Sol-

diers, that she still expects standards to be met and that others describe her as meticulous.

“My leadership style is a little bit more quiet ... is a way to put it,” she said with a smile to her husband.

Ken, who also has been described as meticulous, said being with the family and with Co. C made him a better person.

“I’m proud of having been a part of it and better for knowing them,” he said of his unit. “Their successes have been my successes, and their shortcomings my failings. I doubt that I’ll ever be accused from anyone in that formation of being overly sensitive, but my love for the people standing before you has grown since the day I took command and will continue to grow as I support my wife as she supported me.”

Fallen Heroes

*1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment
2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division*



*PFC Gabriel Jared Figueroa
D Co., 1-8 CAV
Jan. 4, 1987 - April 3, 2007*



*SPC James J. Coon
B Co., 1-8 CAV
Sept. 6, 1984 - April 4, 2007*



*SGT Raymond Sasa Sevaaetasi
E, FSC, 1-8 CAV
Aug. 10, 1977 - April 11, 2007*



*SSG Marlon Brian Harper
HHC, 1-8 CAV
Feb. 8, 1973 - April 12, 2007*